"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1111, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Number 27 - 2 December 1937

AGRICULTURE AS A WAY OF LIFE**

The Catholic Point of View

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As yet, no universal utterance upon the ethical and religious bearings of the agrarian question as a whole has been made by the Catholic Church. Catholic agrarian doctrine has not been formulated as has Catholic doctrine upon the subject, for instance, of industrial relations or international peace. Nevertheless, certain universal pronouncements are of very wide import and affect the heart of agriculture as a way of life. Chief among these I should mention the insistence, in some of the more important recent documents, upon the wide distribution of landed property as essential for human liberty and security, upon the sacredness of the Christian family ideal, upon the evils of large concentrations of capital in land and the consequent need of agrarian reforms, upon the importance of cooperation and cooperative institutions, upon international charity in the economic field, and so forth.

More specific pronouncements, however, on the rural life question as a whole have been made in recent times by prominent Catholic bishops in this country and abroad. Moreover, through continued discussion, extending now over a period of fifteen years, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference has accumulated a body of doctrine upon this topic, much of which is now embodied in their printed proceedings. So that we are not speaking from mere private speculation when we discuss the Catholic point of view.

The Catholic point of view in this matter calls for a much more profoundly radical solution of agriculture's difficulties than is generally accepted today. It is a revoluntionary view, in the genuine sense of the word, inasmuch as it holds that any attempt to reconstruct agriculture so that it may prevail as a way of life against the terrific forces that now threaten the total destruction of any such notion--that any such attempt must mean a complete reversal of the usually accepted order of values. It holds that we must begin with the spiritual concept of the human person, before all questions of gain and profit, before all questions of social or political expediency, and that we shall get absolutely nowhere until we do.

In a personal or personalistic philosophy, therefore, of rural economy, I shall consider people's material needs in relation to that entire hierarchy of values which are found in the human person. I shall be primarily concerned with those things that are essential for him to live and fulfil his destiny here upon earth, and will be concerned with them in the light of that

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**Paper read at the annual meeting of the Christian Rural Fellowship, December, 1937.

destiny, namely, as a spiritual being with an immortal soul. And I shall see all other human needs, educational, recreational, and so forth, in relation to this prime necessity.

I shall be interested in farming as a way of life precisely in order to enable persons to achieve their destiny, not because it is for the good, per se, of society, still less, of the nation or state. If marshes are drained, it is for people to live upon them, not in order to raise grain for Solomon's chariot horses or to supply warriors for Belshazzar.

It will be said that all problems of persons, sooner or later, are economic problems. This I consider a fundamental error, wherein I sharply part company from a considerable school of modern thought. On the contrary, I consider all economic problems as basically moral questions that can be solved only on moral principles and through moral agencies. And the moral solution is to be found in the being: let us speak frankly, in the metaphysics of the human person.

Again, in the Catholic concept, economic problems, which are problems in the last analysis, are in reality problems of families. It is through the family, as the ultimate social unit, that the individual person normally works out his destiny in the handling of the material goods of the earth.

For this reason, farming finds its chief justification as a way of life in the needs of the family, which are objective and perfectly ascertainable needs, rather than in the subjective likes and dislikes of the individual.

Catholic agrarian philosophy is by no means oblivious to the "call of the land" or of the soil: that mystical appeal which the land and the open country with its growing things have to an unspoiled instinct. The Church's liturgy, derived from the Scriptures of Old and New Testament is filled with the imagery of the soil. The Church's calendar is a calendar of farming: spring-time and harvest and seasons. Her sublimest and central Mystery, that of the Holy Eucharist, is consummated in the species of bread and wine. Her contemplative orders seek God in the peace and honest toil of agriculture. Nevertheless, Catholics realize that none of these things in themselves are an adequate motivation for the practical sacrifices that agriculture as a way of life entails. Nor do they find such adequate motivation in a class spirit, in loyalty to farmers' groups as a class. Organized farming, with its method of political or economic pressure is valued by them only in so far as it may enable families to receive their dues in the way of sustenance and fullness of life. But the court of first and last resort is the family, not the individual preference nor the organized group.

We honor farming as a way of life, because agriculture provides the best setting for the home, because it encourages home virtues, makes for stability and purity of family life, the foundation upon which society is built, the milieu in which the individual receives the best start in any form of life that he may later embrace, and that proves itself the best form of life for the majority of human beings. Where do we differ in this from the best Protestant tradition, or the immemorial traditions of Israel?

In the Catholic concept, moreover, the farm home is inseparable from the ownership of the land. Catholic agrarian philosophy is directly opposed to proletarianism, and views the growth of a landless proletariat in

this country as the most alarming economic menace of our times. The growth of latifundia, or huge concentrations of capital in land, has been viewed by Catholics in various foreign countries such as Mexico, in recent years, as a corresponding menace. For this reason we look upon farming as a way of life inseparably associated with the family-sized farm held, when possible, in fee-simple and we are in earnest sympathy with any efforts or measures to make distributed ownership possible, as opposed to tenancy and its correlative, the huge industrialized farm, absentee landlordship or the purely speculative use of land which I personally consider to be the distinctly Anglo-Saxon failing. The German Lutherans of Pennsylvania, or the Portuguese farmers of Rhode Island and Southern Massachusetts, with their insistence upon family farms and stable ownership approach much more to the Catholic concept of the use of the land than does, for instance, a Catholic real-estate man who accommodates himself to the prevailing Anglo-Saxon philosophy.

The Catholic agrarian, moreover, believes in two principles which are seemingly contradictory, yet which work together for the harmonization and stabilization of society: the principle of decentralization and that of cooperation.

Decentralization demands that government shall be, as far as possible, administered locally, and that higher governmental agencies shall be confined to such matters as local communities, from the nature of the case, are incapable of administering. A similar principle applies in the economic field, so that the farmer, in the Catholic idea, will find the chief market for his produce in his immediate neighborhood, and will be in immediate contact with the administrative agencies that affect the marketing and distribution of his product. It needs no explanation to see how far this facilitates the development of farming as a way of life.

Cooperation, on the other hand, is the bulwark against those absorptive and ultimately destructive influences which would make it impossible for the individual person or family to subsist. The basis of cooperation, again, is the person, acting in and through the family, and not society as such. The value, the constructive power of cooperation, lies in the fact that it is the cooperation of free persons, who own their own land, and cooperate precisely in those things where cooperation is needed.

Do Catholics favor cooperative farm ownership, or farm collectivism? No, if it is understood as a general principle, since it would be contrary to the principle of distributed property and would, moreover, generate an industrialized farm proletariat. I say, "as a general principle," since there may be certain instances, as in the case of specialized enterprises or monastic communities, where such collective ownership has a socially constructive character.

On the other hand, the Catholic looks to the fullest extension of the cooperative principle in such fields as do not impair the inviolability of the human person or the sanctity of the home. We desire to see it not only extended into the sphere of credit and of consumer cooperatives, but also into the rural-urban sphere, which is so intimately bound up with the consumer cooperative.

Moreover, we shall go a step further, and advocate the formation of

distinct new economic entities, or occupational groups, in the field of agriculture as in the field of industry, indeed, in collaboration with and in conjunction with industry. Such utterances as were recently made by several of the chief farm-organization leaders of the Middle West, to the effect that there is an essential and irreparable antagonism between industry and agriculture, are utterly abhorrent to the Catholic sense.

This brings us finally to the Catholic concept of the agrarian community itself, which is the environment in which farming as a way of life is obliged to work out its destiny, and from which it derives its immediate spirtual sustenance.

The Catholic distinguishes clearly between the family, or domestic community; the social community; the political community; and the state or civil government, while all these are distinct from the Church or ecclesiastic community. The social community, again, may be viewed as local or national or world-wide. Even where agriculture is firmly established as to the needs of the local community, it is not possible to ignore the needs of the world community, to which we are bound by international charity.

I believe that the only motive which will rouse the initiative and form the characters necessary for reconstructing farming as a way of life are religious motives, the fact that individuals and families best serve and love God when living and working upon the land. I believe the two poles of this agrarian reconstruction--distributed personal ownership and cooperative effort--derive their highest and most effective motivation from religion. In the Catholic rural parish, religion is not an abstraction. It welds the rural community into an organic whole, in which each person finds his part, and young and old, priest and people, producer and consumer, work together for one end, which is the service of God through the common devotion to the common good.

At the center of this parish is the central mystery of the Catholic Faith, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, by which God is brought to men, into the intimate circle of their daily lives, and men are lifted up to God and cleansed of their petty rivalries and disunion. The Catholic conceives an intimate connection between the Mass, the parish and its spiritual activities, the cooperative economic life of its members, and their personal formation as members of an organic whole. Despite the fact that in this country it is difficult to realize this complete Catholic ideal, we have some notable instances thereof; and it is also notable that where they exist, we find the greatest comfort of body and soul in the rural regions for the non-Catholic members of the farming community. The best rural neighbor for Protestant or Jew is the Catholic who lives up thoroughly to his ideal of farming as a way of life.

While Christians unite, at this holy season, to take a Jewish child to their heart, it is my hope that these principles can be maintained or revived at least in their substances in this country. If so, we shall see an end of menacing proletarianism and the truest wisdom for this earth, because earth flourishes best when it finds its guidance from heaven.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.